

DEVELOPMENT AND MIGRATION FROM A GENDER PERSPECTIVE

United Nations International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women (UN-INSTRAW)

A. FOLLOWING UP THE HIGH-LEVEL DIALOGUE ON INTERNATIONAL MIGRATION AND DEVELOPMENT

For many years, migration was considered a mean to alleviate poverty and improve the well-being of households in the developing world. In response to changing global labour markets, the number of female (and male) migrants has increased significantly in recent years, in particular due to the increasing demand for cheap female labour, especially caregivers, from developing countries.

Gender affects every aspect of migration: its causes, patterns, processes and impacts, including the subjective personal experience of migrants. Gender also affects the research priorities, conceptual frameworks and explanatory models of migration scholars and policymakers. Despite the growing importance of female migration and, in particular, the importance of remittances to the economic well-being of many families in developing countries, as well as the ever-growing number of working migrant women, there is little systematic research on the gender dimension of migration and remittances, their impact on community and national development or theoretical models regarding this topic.

In response to this gap in information and understanding, the United Nations International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women (UN-INSTRAW) initiated a series of case studies to analyse gender dimensions of migration and, in particular, the sending, utilization and impact of remittances on community and national development in countries of origin. Specifically, the UN-INSTRAW Gender, Migration and Development Research Programme seeks to increase knowledge and understanding in order to impact policy and programme formulation through a gender analysis in three broad areas:

- (a) The feminization of migration in terms of the changing role of women within migratory flows;
- (b) How the migration of women is affecting gender roles, power relations and decision-making processes in households and communities of origin;
- (c) Policies and programmes aimed at increasing the positive link between migration and remittances, and their impact on development, that include gender perspectives and women's contribution, needs and priorities.

B. ADDRESSING MIGRATION AND DEVELOPMENT LINKS

The work of UN-INSTRAW is varied, including the development of research material, methodological tools and conceptual and theoretical frameworks that guide an analysis of the relationship between migration and development from a gender perspective and the completion of concrete national-level case studies. Research seeks to generate a better understanding of how gender dimensions (feminization of migration, gender inequalities in access to productive resources, sexual division of labour, gender roles, etc.) affect and determine the interconnectedness of migration and development, taking remittances as the key link between them.

The project of UN-INSTRAW on Gender and Remittances: Building Gender-Sensitive Local Development was set up in the following countries: Albania, Dominican Republic, Lesotho, Morocco, the Philippines, Senegal and South Africa, and produced reports focusing on female migrants and their families, including an analysis of remittance transfers and the impact of remittances on local rural development. In order to carry out these projects, UN-INSTRAW established partnerships with other United Nations agencies and civil society institutions. The methodology and conceptual framework established by UN-INSTRAW was utilized by research teams to collect data and assess the use of remittances in the countries of origin of the migrants. The next step in this project entails policy dialogue carried out by country partners identified by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) which use their capacity and local connections to convene stakeholders to begin concrete discussions about policies.

1. Findings

The case studies of UN-INSTRAW show the many ways in which gender directly affects the impact of remittances on different levels of the economy, from the national economy to the individual household. The feminization of migration reflects the new economic roles assumed by women in the migration process. Women are increasingly migrating on their own as main economic providers and heads of households while fewer are migrating as “dependents” of their husbands or male relatives. The steady increase in the number of women who migrate independently can only be understood within the context of the current phase of global capitalist development, in which gender exists as an important variable throughout the process. Women play an important role in the different stages of the migration process, as caregivers for those left behind, as managers of remittances and as emotional supporters of migrants in different circumstances. Therefore, the fundamental role gender plays in migration significantly influences the sending countries and the spending patterns of remittances.

a. Remittances as a substitute for social provisions

Evidence shows that the circle of remittances, investment and development rarely exists. Most of the remittances are used, either by male or female recipients, to guarantee minimum subsistence levels; spending on housing and food. Studies also indicate that remittances are used to substitute social security services which are often not provided by the government in countries of origin. Although it varies between countries, health care coverage is generally deficient in all of the places of origin studied for this project. In order to receive adequate care, households have to pay for private health care services. Therefore, health care becomes a priority expense when monetary resources increase as a result of remittances. Ensuring children’s access to higher education is one of the migrants’ primary objectives in several of the countries analysed. Remittances serve as retirement funds for parents of migrants, unemployment or disability insurance for siblings, support for widowed mothers etc. Widowed mothers, who historically have been excluded from formal employment, benefit from remittances, as they suffer greater vulnerability in terms of becoming widows and being left behind while maintaining a family without support.

b. Gendered usage of remittances

Women play a key role as recipients and managers of remittances. Data reveal that women use remittances primarily for food and education. This supports the hypothesis that the greater women’s control over the household’s monetary resources, whether it is as remitters who maintain strict supervision over the use of the remittances they send, or as administrators of remittances received, the greater the tendency to invest in the overall well-being of the household. In this context it is also

important to consider marital status, offspring, education, relationships within the household, sexual division of labour and other sources of income available to the household in order to understand remittance patterns. These factors are part of the social, economic and political contexts in which the household is placed and which influence the different roles each society attributes to men and women.

c. Sending patterns of remittances

The sex of the migrant affects the volume, frequency and sustainability of remittances over time. Although the amount sent by men and women is often the same, women send a larger part of their salary than men. For all of the cases analysed, this implies a greater effort by women, given the wage discrimination which they often suffer in the destination countries. Women's remittance strategy is sustained by keeping a tight control over expenses, while men reserve greater amounts of money for personal spending, and often requires perseverance in their jobs as live-in domestic workers in order to save as much as possible. This strategy of women might be detrimental to their overall well-being negatively affecting advances in their careers as professionals, investments in education or capacity-building or construction of social capital which would allow them to access other labour sectors outside of domestic service and would also allow them be more integrated into the host society. Hence, this strategy implies high costs for migrant women in terms of their personal well-being, even more so than their male counterparts, and responds to the different gender roles within households that often hold women responsible for the well-being of households.

Women also demonstrate a greater willingness to respond to unexpected situations in their households of origin. Additionally, they show a tendency to favour more members of the extended household, as they are often responsible for providing financial assistance to numerous family members. In many cases, such as the Dominican one, supporting the extended family implies prolonging their stay in the destination country beyond the period of time they had initially planned. It also means delaying, if not giving up, certain objectives upon which the migratory project was originally based. In the case study of Filipino migration to Italy, the pressure that women put on themselves in order to cover the extended family's needs leads them to ask for credit. The high interest rates attached to such services put their own survival at risk in the destination country.

Lastly, women prove to sustain their remittance sending practices over a longer period of time. Male migrants tend to leave behind their household of origin much more easily, as they establish new relationships in their destination countries. However, migrant women who opt to separate from their spouse in the place of origin continue to send remittances for the financial support of their children until they are able to reunite with them in the destination country.

d. Remittance flows' impact on the empowerment of women

In the majority of cases, the increased importance of women as financial providers through remittances has led to greater negotiating and decision-making power in their households. However, this positive effect is not so automatic and is often mediated by other factors. On the one hand, women win recognition and bargaining power in the household and community by becoming financial providers. On the other hand, in places where women have fundamentally been the ones to migrate, social perceptions are ambivalent. They range from valuing the role that these women have played in guaranteeing certain levels of well-being, which otherwise would not have been reached, to blaming them for the abandonment of their children and the possible negative effects that this might have on them. Valuing the role that female

migrants play as 'saviours', in some cases, such as in the case of the Philippines leads to praising women for their heroism. Yet this feeds into the vision of self sacrifice and self exploitation that reinforces the gendered ideology that a woman's priority is her family, over and above any personal interests she may have.

2. Conclusion

Through the incorporation of gendered analyses, the goal is to increase the effectiveness and sustainability of initiatives that harness the potential of remittances for development; give these initiatives the ability to generate development models within which gender equality is a central objective, and contribute to achieving the Millennium Development Goals. The work of UN-INSTRAW influences the institutions and groups that address migration, with the specific goal of systematically incorporating gender issues into the design and delivery of their projects. The initiatives of UN-INSTRAW link applied research with capacity-building and knowledge management in an effort to develop comprehensive programmes that include policy recommendations for future interventions.

C. EMERGING ISSUES AND FURTHER QUESTIONS FOR POTENTIAL RESEARCH

Gender is important for the analysis of remittances, migration and development. The following list provides a summary of future directions for research in this area:

- (a) Analysis of the ways in which migration and work policies in developed countries influence women migrants' access to and participation in labour markets, as well as an evaluation of the impact that women's participation in the labour markets has on remittances;
- (b) Analysis of the changes, breaks and continuities in gender dynamics and inequalities resulting from women's migration, both in the countries of origin and destination;
- (c) Impact of remittance flows on local economies, with a focus on their impact on health, education, food, housing and social protection, while also considering factors that limit or could potentially promote gender-sensitive development. This would include an analysis for the design of concrete interventions to generate sustainable livelihoods from a gender perspective;
- (d) Analysis of global care chains. While economic and social gaps are widening in poor countries, there is a crisis in the established reproductive model in developed countries due to ageing populations, the incorporation of women into the labour market and the lack of public services for the care of dependents;
- (e) Gender analysis of initiatives, programmes and policies for channeling remittances towards productive investment and community development;
- (f) Case studies to analyse remittances and their impact from a gender perspective within specific social, economic and political contexts;
- (g) Dissemination of good practices and experiences in the areas of remittances and development with a gender perspective;

- (h) Development of guidelines and recommendations for both countries of origin and destination for the integration of gender perspectives into proposals for policies and projects that link remittances and development;
- (i) Assessment of the impacts of projects that are being carried out in different places around the world within the co-development framework;
- (j) Issues of de-skilling and the needs of the global labour market which limits women's capacities and continues to devalue women's work within households whether paid or unpaid.